



## PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### *Letter of Request for a Professional Favor*

The key correspondence tool used for networking and professional engagement is typically a letter of inquiry, in which you are requesting a favor, usually information, resources, or advice. You might request a reference letter or a letter of recommendation. Or you might request a shadowing or mentoring opportunity.

There will be occasions, as an aspiring professional, when you would like to contact an experienced or seasoned person in your field to request their expert advice and guidance. Perhaps you are seeking an informal conversation, an informational interview, a job shadowing experience, or a mentorship. Your ability to request a professional favor in a respectful manner is critical to your networking success.

### *Asking for Advice*

Begin by sending a message to request an initial conversation (to arrange for an appointment to meet). Keep it short and concise. Express respect and admiration. Acknowledge their expertise. Adopt a professional, courteous, and deferential tone. Clearly describe the guidance or information you're seeking. Confirm your willingness to do the necessary work and follow-through. Acknowledge and respect the individual's time. Express gratitude.

Describe yourself in a way that includes pertinent information, such as why you are interested in a certain line of work and how that interest came to be. Provide a brief explanation of your educational background and career goals.

If you don't hear from them, follow-up, but don't hound them. Don't be presumptuous or pushy. Remember, you are requesting a favor. They have no obligation to assist you.

### *Sample Letter No. 1*

Hello. I trust you are doing well. I am aware that you are a respected member of the \_\_\_\_\_ field/industry and I am writing to request your professional advice and insight. I am seeking to learn more about my chosen career path.

I am a \_\_\_\_\_ major at the University of Montevallo. My career interests are in the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I have skills and experience related to \_\_\_\_\_. I have a great desire to \_\_\_\_\_. I plan to \_\_\_\_\_.

If you would be willing to share your expertise, I would like to meet with you at your convenience to briefly discuss issues related to the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I would be grateful for the opportunity to speak with you regarding my career goals. Thank you for your consideration.

### *Sample Letter No. 2*

Hello. I hope you are doing well. I have a great deal of respect for you and admire your reputation in the \_\_\_\_\_ field/industry. I am writing to request your advice and insight regarding my career goals.

I am a \_\_\_\_\_ major at the University of Montevallo. My career interests are in the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I have skills and experience related to \_\_\_\_\_. I have a great desire to \_\_\_\_\_. I plan to \_\_\_\_\_.

I recognize that you are busy. But, if time permits, I would like to meet with you at your convenience to chat briefly about the issues and realities of the \_\_\_\_\_ field/industry. I know I would benefit from your guidance and would be grateful for the opportunity to learn from your expertise.

## *Sample Questions*

- Can I get your expertise regarding issues in the field and your advice about my career path?
- How does someone with my career ambitions go about learning more about my field/industry?
- What would you tell a beginner like me who is entering your field/industry?
- How does someone with my background explore her career options?
- What insights would you be willing to offer an aspiring professional like myself?
- What are the positive and negative factors related to your field/industry?
- What piece of advice do you wish someone had given you when you were starting out?

## *Sample Phrases*

- I attended your "Effective Merchandising Techniques" presentation last Friday and introduced myself to you following your lecture. Your speech was very informative, and your examples were extremely enlightening. I left with a number of new ideas.
- You are a key player in the field I have a passion for. I'd be grateful for your expert advice and insight regarding my career aspirations.
- I am in the process of a job change following my former employer's reorganization. I am writing to people in the field whose opinions, insights, and advice I value.
- I am a great admirer of your work. I'd be grateful for the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience for your advice and insight. I know I would benefit from your expertise.
- My professor, Dr. Smith, gave me your name and indicated that I should call you. I understand from him that you are an expert in the art history field.
- I was given your name by a mutual contact of ours, Helen McDonald, who suggested that I might get in touch with you for some assistance with my career plans. I am currently exploring the possibility of moving into the financial services field and Helen thought that you might be able to offer me some advice and guidance.
- Your reputation in the field of journalism is stellar. Your contributions to the industry are impressive. I would like to inquire about the possibility of meeting with you in hopes of learning from your experience and expertise.
- I have always been impressed by your company and its reputation in the industry for top notch marketing strategy. I am eager to learn more about your organization and would be grateful to you for any insights you would be willing to offer me.
- I was given your name by my professor, Dr. Jones. She told me that you were a practicing actuary. She recommended you as a good person to talk to about the actuary industry.
- You are easily recognized as one of our most successful alumni. I certainly am impressed by your work. I was hoping to meet with you, at your convenience, to ask you a few questions about your career and to request your advice about my career.